Guide Dogs Victoria’s On the Move – June 2017 Bulletin

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# Tips for reading this newsletter

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		2. Click the zoom setting that you want or type a percentage in the Percent box.

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# Editor’s update

Hi everyone! On The Move is a bit of a longer read this month, as there are two important resource articles that we want to share with you. So grab a cuppa and a bickie, and settle down in your favourite chair!

The first article is about Self-advocacy – speaking up for yourself when you encounter an issue or something discriminatory out in the community. This can often be an upsetting and intimidating situation, and one of our jobs here at GDV is to help support you with the skills to confidently self-advocate. The article outlines the steps to self-advocacy, and also contains a comprehensive directory of contact information for organisations you might need to involve in making a complaint or getting an unfair process changed.

The second article is aimed at Guide Dog Handlers and outlines our recommendation for Pet Insurance coverage for all working Guide Dogs (and indeed this is a requirement for NDIS funded clients). We understand this can be daunting in terms of cost and all the different options out there, so we have put together a set of considerations to help you navigate the market and get the coverage that is right for you.

We hope that you find these articles provide some valuable guidance in both these complex areas. If there are any other topics that you would like us to explore in On The Move let us know!

Sophie Wild

Bulletin Editor

# Upcoming programs and events for your diary

* **Understanding Acquired Brain Injury and Low Vision** – 23rd August and 8th November. A one-day information program for people with vision changes secondary to an acquired brain injury (ABI).  The day will aim to help you and your family gain an understanding of how vision can change following an ABI, such as stroke, accident, surgery, tumour or other brain injury.  It will investigate how changes to the brain’s function can impact on mobility in unexpected ways.  The day will also provide an opportunity to share experiences with people of all ages, and their families, who have low vision or blindness from an ABI. Places are limited to so please book your place by emailing CSAdmin@guidedogsvictoria.com.au or call 1800 804 805.
* **Young Adults Program (YAP):** Connecting young people (approximate age 18-30) with low vision or blindness for discussions and fun activities. YAP sessions run bi-monthly throughout the year. Contact rachelh@guidedogsvictoria.com.au for more information.

**You’re invited! Social events**

* **Coffee mornings every Friday in the Frankston area.** If you enjoy having a cuppa and meeting new friends, please join our casual client run coffee mornings. New members always welcome. For details please contact Robert on 0409 685 606 or email
rgsblind@yahoo.com.au

Following on from the success of our Frankston Coffee Club, we are currently canvassing interest **in similar programs being run in Mornington and Pakenham.** These catch-ups are a great opportunity to meet up and discuss topics such as transport, technology, the NDIS roll-out as well as a great excuse to have a chat and great coffee! If you or someone you know might be interested or has any further questions, please contact Tim Carter on (03) 9854 4448 or by email at timc@guidedogsvictoria.com.au

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# Self-Advocacy…when you need to speak out!

Advocacy is about speaking out to make things better for you and for others, achieving independence and equality. It’s a really important way of making sure that things change for the better for the vision loss community, and educating the wider community on respectful and lawful interactions with a person who has vision loss.



(image: megaphone with words ‘Self Advocacy, your voice matters’)

Most people in the vision loss community experience issues with access at some stage of their life and, from our experience, the probability of this happening with a Guide Dog is especially high.

We can help by providing you with contact information to head you in the right direction to advocate individually if something happens that you need to provide feedback about for change. (see the directory at the end of this article, or call 1800 804 805 to speak with our Customer Services Team). In most circumstances it is best for you to lead this individual advocacy process as you have all the relevant information, it gives you the control over the situation, and it is very important that the organization you are lodging your feedback with hears about your specific needs or concerns. We can help you by putting you in touch with the right organization or department that you need to talk to, and in some circumstances we can accompany you or provide extra support or documentation.

Some people can be concerned that they are making a fuss, or that things will never change. In fact, it is your right to be treated equally and it is very important to speak up when you need to.

## Steps in self-advocacy

1) If you feel comfortable at the time the issue occurs say something. For example, if a bus driver isn’t making the announcements you need, ask them to. If you are refused access with your Guide Dog, show your Guide Dog access card and politely point out your rights. (An important point here though is to distinguish between being questioned about your Guide Dog, and being refused. It is part of a business owner’s duty-of-care to other customers to check that dogs on their premises are authorised. An unfortunate result of the recent proliferation of assistance animals is that business owners are confused about identifying harnesses and coats. So if you are just being questioned about your dog, rather than directly refused, please don’t get angry but see it as a positive opportunity to educate the person involved. Using your Guide Dog Handlers card here is a great way to explain the law).

2)   If asking at the time doesn’t resolve the situation, or you don’t feel comfortable speaking up (which is fine!), try to think calmly about what has happened, identify the problem, and the impact it has on you. It’s understandable for you to feel upset, but advocacy is usually much more effective if it is done calmly and respectfully, aiming for improvement. Some people like to write down a few key points, or talk this through with a trusted friend or family member to prepare.

3)    Think about what you want to happen. Do you want a change in a process or even a law, do you want an apology, or both?

* + Contact the organization involved in the interaction – this might be by phone, email or letter, whichever you feel most comfortable with. We have listed some key organisations below, or you can ring our Customer Service Gateway on 1800 804 805 to ask for other contact information help if you need it. If you are making a phone call then have your list of issues or friend with you so you can be sure you cover each of your points. You may want to document who you talk to and important things said. Note that if you record the conversation it is best to let the person you are speaking to know you are doing this to ensure you are legally covered.

	Most antidiscrimination obligations fall under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1992. It is often worth mentioning in any initial complaint, to ensure that the organization realizes it has obligation. Most discrimination is not malicious, but done through ignorance of the law. If you want to mention the DDA then the following sections present the most common complaint areas: Sections 15-29: Assistance animals; Section 15: Discrimination in employment; Section 22: Education; Section 23: Access to premises; Section 24: Goods, services and facilities; Section 25: Accommodation

For example, if you and your Guide Dog are refused access to a restaurant you could say “did you know that under the Disability Discrimination Act sections 15-29, you must allow my Guide Dog access to your restaurant when accompanying me?”

Or if you felt that by not announcing stops a bus company prevents you from using their service effectively, then you could mention DDA section 24.

An employee needing their employer to supply accessible presentations could mention DDA section 15, and so on.

4)    If you don’t feel satisfied with the outcome then you may want to escalate your complaint or concern to a governing body or ombudsman who may have influence to make the organization in question change. We also supply key contact information for these below. You can also go to Blind Citizens Australia ([www.bca.org.au](http://www.bca.org.au)) who may be able to provide additional representation.

Guide Dogs Victoria, and other organisations like Blind Citizens Australia, also have a role in advocating on a wide scale to influence policies and ‘the system’. We do this by creating awareness, educating the public and policy makers, and lobbying organisations for change. We may sometimes ask for your help by giving us feedback, or by surveying your experiences, when we are campaigning in this way.

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# Directory of contact details for self-advocacy:

## Public Transport Feedback

First, contact the organization concerned:

**1) Public Transport Victoria** – oversees Public Transport. You can submit feedback and complaints to them on

**Phone**: 1800 800 007

**Online at**: <https://feedback.ptv.vic.gov.au/ptv-feedback>

**In person** at PTV Hubs (locations - <https://www.ptv.vic.gov.au/customer-service/ptv-hubs/>)

**In writing to:** Customer Relations**,** Public Transport Victoria**,** PO Box 4724**,** MELBOURNE VIC 3001

They can pass complaints onto other transport organisations, or you can contact these directly:

**2) Yarra Trams**

**Phone**: 1800 800 807

**Online**: <http://www.yarratrams.com.au/contact-us/getting-in-touch/customer-feedback/>

**In writing:** Customer Feedback, Yarra Trams, GPO Box 5231, Melbourne, 3001, Victoria

**3) Metro Trains**

**Phone: 1800 800 807**

**Online:** [www.metrotrains.com.au](http://www.metrotrains.com.au)

**In writing:** Metro Trains Melbourne, Customer Feedback, GPO Box 1880, MELBOURNE VIC 3001

**4) VLINE Trains**

**Phone**: 1800 800 007

**Online**: [www.vline.com.au/contactus](http://www.vline.com.au/contactus)

**In writing:** V/Line Customer Relations**,** Reply Paid 5343**,**Melbourne VIC 3001

**5) Taxi Services Commission Phone**: 1800 638 802

**Online**: <http://taxi.vic.gov.au/about-us/feedback-form>

**In writing:** GPO Box 1716**,** Melbourne VIC 3001

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If dissatisfied you can escalate to:

**Public Transport Ombudsman:** The Public Transport Ombudsman deals with complaints about Victorian public transport that members of the community have been unable to resolve directly with the public transport operators.

**Phone**:  1800 466 865
**Website**: [www.ptovic.com.au](http://www.ptovic.com.au)

## Issues with government or local council

First contact the government department or local council concerned. If you are dissatisfied with the response, escalate to:

**Victorian Ombudsman:** The Victorian Ombudsman is an independent officer of the Victorian Parliament who investigates complaints about state government departments, most statutory authorities and local government. The Ombudsman investigates complaints about administrative actions and decisions taken by government authorities and about the conduct or behaviour of their staff. The Ombudsman is independent and impartial and provides a free service.

**Phone**:  (03) 9613 6222
**Website**: [www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au](http://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au)

## Issues with private businesses such as restaurants, accommodation, Disability/service providers

First, contact the business concerned. If you are dissatisfied with the response, escalate to:

**Disability Services Commissioner:** The Disability Services Commissioner can respond to complaints about Victorian disability services.

**Phone**:  1800 677 342

**Website**: [www.odsc.vic.gov.au](http://www.odsc.vic.gov.au)

**Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission:** Responsible for eliminating discrimination in Victoria. Offers information, education and consultancy services, conducts research and provides legal and policy advice.

**Phone**:  1300 292 153
**Website**: [www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au](http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au)

**Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT):** VCAT provides low cost, accessible, efficient and independent tribunal/dispute resolution proceedings. The Civil Division hears and determines a range of civil disputes relating to consumer matters, domestic building works, legal services, owners corporation matters, residential and retail tenancies disputes, sale and ownership of real property, and use or flow of water between properties.

**Phone**:  (03) 9628 9900

**Website**:  [www.vcat.vic.gov.au](http://www.vcat.vic.gov.au)

## Further Advice and legal support

**Complaint Line:** Complaint line is an online directory to help you find someone who can assist you with a complaint that you haven’t been able to resolve with the service provider yourself. Complaint line has information and links to dispute resolution schemes Australia-wide. Complaint line links you to important customer codes, contracts and charters, industry codes of practice and regulations, so that you can better understand your rights and the company's obligations.

**Website**: [www.complaintline.com.au](http://www.complaintline.com.au)

**Consumer Affairs Victoria:** Promotes consumer protection and ethical trading and ensures that consumer protection laws are properly enforced.

**Phone**:  1300 55 81 81

**Website**: [www.consumer.vic.gov.au](http://www.consumer.vic.gov.au)

**Office of the Public Advocate:** Represents the interests of Victorian people with disabilities.

**Phone**:  1300 309 337
**Website**: [www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au](http://www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au)

**Australian Centre for Disability Law:** The Australian Centre for Disability Law is a specialist community legal centre which promotes and protects the rights of people with a disability by providing free legal advice and representation in disability discrimination cases.

**Phone**:  1800 800 708

**Website**: [www.disabilitylaw.org.au](http://www.disabilitylaw.org.au/)

**Community Legal Centres:** Community legal centres provide free legal services including information, referral, advice, casework assistance, community legal education, and policy and law reform. The National Association of Community Legal Centres does not provide legal advice but has created a database of community legal centres in each state and territory. To find a community legal centre near you, visit the National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC) website.

**Phone**:  (02) 9264 9595

**Website**: [www.naclc.org.au](http://www.naclc.org.au)

#### Disability Discrimination Legal Service: The Disability Discrimination Legal Service Inc. (DDLS) is a statewide independent community legal centre that specialises in disability discrimination legal matters. DDLS provides free legal services in several areas including information, referral, advice, casework assistance, community legal education, and policy and law reform.

**Phone**:  (03) 9654 8644

**Website**:  [www.communitylaw.org.au/clc\_ddls](http://www.communitylaw.org.au/clc_ddls)

The above directory information has been largely sourced from Blind Citizens Australia Victorian Toolkit which can be found at [www.bca.org.au](http://www.bca.org.au). Blind Citizens Australia exists to provide a voice for all Australians with blindness or low vision. They provide information, peer support, consultancy and can also assist with advocacy.

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# Bollards!

We aren’t being cheeky (well a little!). We wanted to let you all know about changes you may experience to many major Melbourne CBD footpaths, with the introduction of security bollards.

There are many reasons that the environments you regularly travel through may change, expectedly or unexpectedly. The footpath may be being repaired, the bus stop has been moved, the entrance to a station has been altered etc. Some changes are permanent, some temporary; some cause little disruption to our journey and others are challenging to negotiate.

Last week environmental changes have occurred in the city of Melbourne. These are not your predicted changes. The government implemented overnight installation of bollards to prevent vehicles being deliberately driven onto high pedestrian flow footpaths. These bollards are concrete, limited contrast to the ground, approximately 1 metre square and spaced about one and half metres apart outside Federation Square and in parts of Bourke Street.



(photo: cubes of concrete edge the pavement by Federation Square)

Whilst these concrete blocks are temporary, there is a plan to replace them with permanent ones within 6 months. The style of the replacement bollards is yet to be revealed but may include planter boxes or weighted benches for example. We may come across more bollards being installed across the city/state in time.

If these bollards cause any disruption to your independent orientation within the city, GDV recommends self-navigate where possible, and request assistance from the public if needed. Of course, we welcome clients to request our assistance if they’re interrupting a regular route - a GDV Practitioner can provide training to negotiate a safe route around the bollards.

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# Information for Guide Dog Handlers – the importance of Pet Insurance

Sadly, it is inevitable that some of our Guide Dogs will have accidents or become ill, and it can be even more stressful for the Handler if this causes large vet fees, or even ones that are so unaffordable they force a decision about euthanasia.

Like food bills and grooming costs, vet fees are the responsibility of the Guide Dog Handler, although GDV will help in cases of hardship. Vet fees can be large and unpredictable because, unlike human healthcare, they are not regulated or subsidised by the government. It is not unusual for GDV to get requests for assistance with vet bill for Guide Dogs who are not insured. However, GDV has vet bills of over $250,000 each year across our dog colony, and getting Pet Insurance is a great way that you can contribute to the health and longevity of your working Guide Dog and lessen pressure on our funding. We strongly recommend that ALL clients with Guide Dogs get Pet Insurance cover if they possibly can.

In the case of Guide Dog Handler clients who have National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) funding, it is a requirement that you get Pet Insurance. Part of your Guide Dog annual maintenance NDIS funding is provided specifically to pay for Pet Insurance. If you do not have a policy, the NDIS may refuse to cover any vet bills incurred. It is of course still your choice which Pet Insurance to buy.



(photo: Yellow lab at the vets with its leg bandaged)

## Things to consider when choosing pet insurance

**What does it cover?**

•   Accident only - This covers vet costs where your pet is involved in an accident (premiums are usually about $20 per month)

•   Accident and illness - This covers vet costs for accidents as well as illnesses (premiums are usually between $35-55 per month)

•   Accident and illness plus routine and preventative care - This covers routine vaccinations and worming treatments as well as vet costs for accidents and illnesses (premiums are usually $60 plus per month). These are probably unnecessary for Guide Dogs as GDVs partners provide worming and blood tests, and many vets provide free vaccinations to working Guide Dogs.

We would recommend that you get Accident & Illness cover, as accident-only insurance may not provide adequate cover for most instances.

**Pet age limits**

New policies are generally not available for older dogs (between 7 and 9 years of age and above, depending on the policy terms). Once your Guide Dog reaches a certain age, you will probably not be able to switch to another insurer or brand.

**Excess and co-payments**

Many policies require you to pay excess when you make a claim. Many policies also don’t cover 100% of the costs, but expect you to contribute 25% or more of the vet bill, especially if your dog is older. Check your policy to understand the excess or co-payment.

Most policies also have a limit per year, or per condition. Any amount above this limit, you will have to pay. The good news is that picking higher excesses or copayments often reduces your annual premium cost, but you risk paying more if your dog does need a vet.

**What doesn’t it cover?**

Pet insurance policies have a number of exclusions. These are the things you are not covered for. The exclusions usually include:

•   Illness or injury from pre-existing conditions (including conditions before the policy was purchased)

•   Bilateral conditions (pre-existing conditions affecting a body part where the pet has more than one, such as an eye or ear)

•   Vet costs for elective treatments (like orthodontics) or routine care (unless specific additional cover is purchased for this)

•   Special prescription diet foods

•   You may also have a waiting period before you can claim (often 30 days, but check).

You can get an easy independent pet insurance comparison with reviews at <http://top10petinsurance.com.au/compare-pet-insurance/> and we will be putting an accessible version of this table on the resources section of our website. Premiums for Accident & Illness cover varied from $36 to $69 per month, with annual coverage of 80% of $7,500 to $15,000.

Guide Dogs also sells a pet insurance product covering 100% of vet fees (minus excess) up to an annual limit of $7000, $10000 or $15000, but we are in the process of renegotiating this to offer an improved product that will be released in September.

You can also get comparison quotes for pet insurance policies on the following websites, but be aware that these might not include an independent selection of the market.

<https://www.canstar.com.au/pet-insurance/>

<https://www.comparethemarket.com.au>

<https://www.choosi.com.au/pet-insurance>

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# Vet Clinic Memories Competition

Many of you will have visited our vet clinic and encountered our wonderful vets Elaine and Ann, as part of your annual Guide Dog health checks, and if you have had any emergencies.

Elaine and Ann have worked with us for many years, without a pay rise and going easily over the hours they are contracted for. This has helped us keep our vet clinic costs lower than they would have been otherwise.

We want to make a thankyou book for our vets, and would love to hear any memories or stories you have about Elaine or Ann. Maybe they reassured you when you were worried about your Guide Dog, or had to help when your dog did something naughty (like ate the Dynamic Lifter!). Or maybe their kindness made all the difference when you were worried or stressed. Send your story or memory to sophiew@guidedogsvictoria.com.au. The first two received will get a copy of the heart-warming No 1 bestseller ‘A Street Cat named Bob’ on audiobook.

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# Grand Prix experiences



(photo: Lewis Hamilton meets Guide Dog Ambassador black lab Maxwell)

As well as F1 drivers meeting Guide Dogs, some of our lucky clients won trips behind the scenes to the drivers’ Pit Paddock, or rides around the track in Ferraris.

We asked some of these On The Move prize-winners to describe their experience. This is what they told us.

“Thanks so much for the Grand Prix experience. We had such a wonderful day and enjoyed every moment. Our behind the scenes tour took us into the pit paddock where we wandered past the team garages and through the exclusive hospitality precinct for the teams where they eat, drink and work. There were people everywhere. We could hear the media performing interviews, fans cheering as the drivers arrived and team staff buzzing around us in preparation for the race. It felt amazing to be so close to the action. “ Marita – experience winner

“Window up. (Can't mess up the hair!) Smoothness and comfort outstanding. New car smell. 190 down straight with more gears left. Cornering gees was amazing". Matthew – experience winner

“And a VERY big thanks to Matthew's driver, Tony, a totally awesome, down to earth top bloke & of course also a big thanks to GDV for this wonderful experience & the opportunity for us to spend some great family time together with a shared passion - motor sport!” Melanie – Matthew's sister who accompanied him to the Grand Prix.

“I’d like to thank GDV and the Grand Prix for this once in a lifetime experience. I was so excited this morning that even though I didn’t have to leave home until about 9 I was up at 5.30, all ready and I had plenty of time left!...Unfortunately the driver won’t let me drive it but I enjoyed it as a passenger, it was fantastic!” Twanny – experience winner

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# Jobs at Guide Dogs Victoria

Guide Dogs Victoria welcomes applicants who are blind or who have low vision to apply for vacancies.

Summaries of current vacancies can be found below. If you are interested in applying then please view the detailed information on our website – links are given next to each job summary.

### Guide Dog Mobility Instructor

Guide Dogs Victoria currently has a vacancy for an experienced professional to join our team in the role of Guide Dog Mobility Instructor on a full time permanent basis.

The purpose of this role is to assess and train guide dogs and to provide mobility programs to people with low vision or blindness that meet the needs of the individual, while at the same time adhering to Guide Dogs Victoria and IGDF standards. You will need a Guide dog Mobility Instructor qualification gained from a member school of the International Guide Dog Federation, and a recognized qualification as an Orientation and Mobility Instructor. Applications close 31st December 2017.

To apply, see full information and job requirements at <https://www.guidedogsvictoria.com.au/careers/guide-dog-mobility-instructor/>

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# Share your story

If you have a story you’d like to share about your low vision or blindness, your achievements, your experiences with our services or being matched with your Guide Dog, we’d love to hear from you. The marketing team are always on the lookout to feature our client’s stories in the media, to help spread the word about the wonderful work of Guide Dogs Victoria and to increase public awareness about people living with low vision or blindness. If you are comfortable with sharing your story, please email the marketing team at marketing@guidedogsvictoria.com.auto get in touch.

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# Feedback

If you have anything to contribute to this newsletter, please feel free to contact us with your piece. We welcome all contributions.

Please either contact or email our client services administration team with your contributions as below:

csadmin@guidedogsvictoria.com.au or phone 1800 804 805.

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